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ABSTRACT

A naturalistic study investigated writing-related teacher planning and classroom activities in a combined second and third grade classroom and a sixth grade classroom. Data were collected from participant observation, teachers' reflections on classroom writing, and naturally occurring teacher and student writing samples. The study, which was based on the assumption that writing is a form of social interaction, produced a number of findings, including the following: (1) writing is a frequent part of classroom life; (2) its many forms and functions depend on classroom social contexts; (3) key classroom writing functions are writing to know oneself and others, to occupy free time, to participate in the community, and to demonstrate academic achievement; (4) teachers focus more on developing occasions for writing than on presenting discrete lessons in writing skills; (5) writing occasions often involve skills integration both with the language arts and across subject areas; and (6) occasions for writing require a wide range of teacher planning skills. (MM)

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Research Series No. 104

UNDERSTANDING WRITING IN SCHOOL: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF WRITING AND ITS INSTRUCTION IN TWO CLASSROOMS (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Christopher M. Clark and Susan Florio
with
Janis L. Elmore, S. June Martin,
Rhoda J. Maxwell, and William Metheny

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CS 208 033

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UNDERSTANDING WRITING IN SCHOOL: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF WRITING AND ITS INSTRUCTION IN TWO CLASSROOMS

(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Christopher M. Clark and Susan Florio[1]

with

Janis L. Elmore, S. June Martin, Rhoda J. Maxwell, and William Metheny

Description of the Study

During 1979-81, a naturalistic study of schooling and the acquisition of written literacy was undertaken by the authors. The study had the following four purposes:

1. to document how two teachers and their respective students produce occasions for writing by means of interaction,

2. to describe the process of teacher planning for writing instruction as it relates to shaping these occasions for writing and overseeing the general evolution of the classroom as a community,

3. to develop a typology of the diverse occasions for writing extant in each classroom as they are construed by teachers and students, and

4. to examine these occasions as contexts for writing that may make differing cognitive and social demands on the students as writers and to document these differences.

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[1]Christopher M. Clark is an associate professor of educational psychology. Susan Florio is an associate professor of teacher education. Together, Clark and Florio coordinated the Written Literacy Project, on which this report is based, and they will coordinate the follow-up project, a Written Literacy Forum. Their names are listed alphabetically here. Both contributed equally to the project and this report.

Janis L. Elmore is an IRT research intern. S. June Martin is a research assistant. Rhoda J. Maxwell is an IRT teacher collaborator. Formerly an IRT research intern, William Metheny is now a research specialist for the MSU Office of Medical Education Research and Development.

Research Questions and Data Collection

The research was pursued in two schools in a mid-Michigan suburban community. Researchers recorded, described, and analyzed classroom activities and teacher planning as they related to writing in one second/third-grade classroom and one sixth-grade classroom. The research was initiated with the following guiding questions about the nature of writing instruction and the process of becoming a writer within the formal setting of the school:

1. What is the nature of the process of acquisition of written literacy as it is realized in school?
2. How does the acquisition process work in classrooms?
3. What are the implications of this information for curriculum, instruction, and teacher education?

The initial questions were deliberately broad since pilot work suggested that it might be quite misleading a priori to decide where in school one might find writing taking place, which teaching behaviors might count as writing instruction in the classroom, or what kinds of graphic symbolizing on the part of children might function communicatively. To understand the acquisition of written literacy in school, the particulars of classroom life and the thoughts and plans of teachers were broadly sampled at the outset. The aim was gradually to discover which among these pieces of data would best tell the story of writing and its instruction in the terms of the teachers and children studied and in ways that would add to the body of knowledge about the process of writing and its instruction.

Obviously questions of such a broad nature are not directly answerable by means of naturalistic observation. Upon entering the field, the researcher is confronted not with answers, but with a flood of particular

behaviors. Some behaviors are observed and not commented or reflected upon directly by teachers and children as they enact everyday life in school. Other behaviors are the descriptions and explanations that participants offer for classroom activity that can be elicited directly from them by means of interview or can be heard in their talk to one another about school life. The data collected in this study came from six sources and correspond to these two classes of behavior. They include the following:

1. participant observation, in which researchers spent extended periods of time in the classroom taking field notes and attempting to understand the classroom as a community for learning and the functions of writing within it;

2. elicitations of teacher thinking about writing in the classroom of four types:

   a. weekly journals in which the teachers recorded their plans for and reflections upon teaching in general and writing instruction in particular,

   b. weekly interviews in which each teacher discussed her/his journal entries with a researcher,

   c. monthly meetings in which the teachers and the research staff discussed patterns emerging in the data and other research-related issues, and

   d. viewing sessions in which teachers viewed videotapes made occasionally in their rooms and discussed their content;

3. audiovisual recordings of naturally occurring classroom life, in which researchers attempted periodically to capture for later analysis and for discussion with the teachers those classroom interactions that appeared to be related to writing and its use; and

4. writing samples produced by both students and teachers in naturally occurring classroom activity that were used to illuminate and supplement analysis of classroom writing activities and teacher plans.

Pilot work in both the planning and enactment of writing instruction in classrooms and review of literature on written communication provided a set of potential middle range questions that were asked as the data began to accumulate. These questions concerned participants' implicit theories about writing--its content, the activities that motivate it, and the roles played by teachers and students in its production. In addition, these questions concerned the ways in which such implicit theories might be reflected in teacher planning, classroom interaction, and student writing. The questions at this level were continuously evolving ones that were structured by and helped to structure subsequent data collection. The theoretical orientations with which we began our study helped to determine our methods of data collection, reduction, and analysis. Using techniques such as participant observation, journal-keeping, interview, and collection of documents, we hoped to develop theoretically grounded descriptions of writing and its instruction in two classrooms.

Theoretical Assumptions and Working Hypotheses

A description of writing in two classrooms is the heart of the project. That description is intended to illuminate both occasions for writing in the classroom and the teacher beliefs and plans that help to shape them. It is important to recall that the description has been derived by observing everyday life in two classrooms and by asking teachers to share, in the course of their regular efforts, their beliefs and plans about writing and its use.

Because no observation is unbiased, it is important to mention the several kinds of information that contributed to the sense made of what

was seen, read, and heard in the classrooms. Information about theoretical presuppositions, methodological decisions, and the frames for interpretation that were applied to the data should help the reader to locate the descriptions and analyses offered in an intellectual context and should stimulate discussion and criticism of the findings.

Perhaps the key assumption of this research on written literacy is that writing is a form of social action, one way in which the members of a community transact across time and distance to accomplish social life and work. That assumption has implications for how one studies writing. For example, on the basis of that assumption, this study emphasized the process and use of writing in classrooms rather than the written products artifactual to that process in isolation. Important to the study of writing in use is the analyst's ability to document the social conditions out of which writing arises and the grounds on which participants select writing as the appropriate expressive alternative on any given occasion. To gain this kind of insight into social action and its meaning in the research, additional assumptions and attendant methodological decisions were made. It was assumed, for example, that it would be crucial to understand the subjective point of view of the classroom participants. The hypotheses subsequently generated and tested, and the means of testing them, pertained to the nature of this point of view and its relation to the classroom events observed.

The study was further limited in significant ways in that it highlighted the teacher as purveyor and planner of the learning environment in which writing takes place. Clearly one could have elected to focus instead on the students as writers or on the functions of writing in

other social contexts in children's lives. Selecting the teacher as the focus for study was deliberate and rooted in a concern that the research illuminate writing instruction as one of the important pedogogical responsibilities of teachers in our culture. It reflects a bias as well that the classroom is a significant place in the child's universe where writing is learned and used.

In order to understand the point of view of the teacher and its relation to writing as social action in the classroom, it is necessary to consider both what is observable in classroom behavior and what is inferrable about the mental life of the teacher. There are many ways to move beyond mere observation of phenomena to an understanding of their meanings to participants. Sometimes people can give words to the meanings they hold; sometimes they reveal their meaning systems in patterns of action. Thus the researchers asked the teachers participating in the study to share in both writing and conversation what they thought about writing in their classrooms. In addition, by means of participant observation, the researchers lived some part of the teachers' lives with them. This primary experience of their world informed the researchers' questioning of them and aided in the interpretation of the self-reports of the teachers. Finally, the teachers were engaged directly in the deliberative process at monthly meetings where they joined the researchers in thinking from the data by generating hypotheses and relating variables in meaningful ways in order to explain classroom observations. In short, the teachers joined the researchers in generating theory about practice.

The decision to undertake the study reported here was the result of pilot work by the principal investigators on writing instruction and

review of research on writing extant in the fields of anthropology, psychology, and sociolinguistics. Thus the researchers did not enter the field without a conceptual orientation. Despite these conceptual organizers, the complex nature of the research problem and the methods used to address it enabled the generation of many new hypotheses, not a priori, but in terms of and as a consequence of the life observed unfolding in the classrooms, interviews, and journals.

Data Reduction and Analysis

The processes of reduction and analysis of the descriptive data would have been unwieldy, if not impossible, if the researchers had waited until the completion of data collection to begin them. The data set included field notes, videotapes, teacher journals, interviews, and student work samples. Working with data that are collected naturalistically over time can present problems and provide advantages. To get the most from our data set, it was necessary to plan for the gradual reducation and analysis of information gathered while still in the field.

The data collected had the following features bearing on reduction and analysis:

1. Some of the data were collected in relatively unstructured ways in that an attempt was made to limit the imposition of a priori analytic categories on what was seen, heard, and read (e.g., field notes, continuous videotapes of naturally occurring classroom activity, writing samples, open-ended journal keeping).

2. Some of the data were collected by more structured means (e.g., scheduled interviews with teachers).

For the most part, categories for analysis were arrived at inductively as participants sifted the naturalistic data for patterns of meaningful activity in writing and writing instruction. In addition, insights

from previous research, literature on both the writing and teaching processes, and the experience of participating teachers provided potential conceptual levers that the researchers used to make sense of the data.

The study's interdisciplinary research staff worked together in the development of a series of descriptions of the acquisition of written literacy in the two classrooms studied. The collaborative working relationship was important for two reasons. First, because of ongoing contact among participating teachers and the interdisciplinary team, it was possible collaboratively to engage in a cyclic process involving the formation of working hypotheses about what was happening in planning and instruction, the testing of those hypotheses in subsequent data collected, and the refinement of the working hypotheses. Such a design made it possible for the project staff to test and refine descriptive models of the process of writing instruction in the two classrooms that were grounded in the observed phenomena. The second advantage of such a research design for the processes of data reduction and analysis was that it fostered the process of triangulation.

By examining written, oral, and observational data with varying degrees of structure and from the perspectives of various investigators, the researchers hoped to reflect as validly as possible the perspectives of the participating teachers. By means of multiple methods and opportunities for the researchers and teachers to cross-check their inferences about the data both as they were collected and retrospectively, the researchers hoped to maximize coverage and understanding of writing and its instruction in the two classrooms of interest.

The processes described here yielded the following three-step procedure for reporting the research:

1. Define a descriptive unit of analysis that makes sense to all of the participants in the research. (This unit was termed an "occasion for writing.")

2. Identify a manageably small number of such occasions for writing that are of theoretical importance and of significance to the classroom participants.

3. Describe the genesis, unfolding, and fate of these occasions for writing both individually and in relation to one another using multiple data sources to enrich the descriptions and to cross-check inferences about their meaning.

The Safety Posters Activity: An Occasion for Writing

The following story of an occasion for writing is offered to give the reader a feeling for the kinds of data and analytic approaches used in this study.

The following paragraph is an excerpt from notes taken during an interview of Ms. Donovan,[2] the teacher of a combined second/third grade, on Monday, September 17, 1979, the eighth school day of the year:

> In our interview, Ms. Donovan described how she used an unexpected traffic safety assembly as an opportunity to do a writing exercise. The assembly included a film on bicycle and pedestrian safety and a talk on the same subject. After Ms. Donovan and her students returned to Room 12, she asked them to recall some of the safety rules that they had just heard about. Ms. Donovan said that she was very surprised at the terrific difficulty that the children had in remembering the safety rules. At first, they could remember only the general topic of the assembly. With some coaching and reminding, several of the rules

[2]The names of the teachers, children, schools, and school district used in this report are pseudonyms.

> were recalled. Then Ms. Donovan asked the students each to choose one safety rule and draw a picture illustrating the rule. These poster-size pictures, with the safety rules as captions, will be posted in the hallways as a service and a reminder to the other students in the school. (Interview Notes, 9/17/79)

The Safety Posters Activity is an early and telling example of occasions for writing in this primary-grade classroom. It began with the unexpected: a school-wide assembly that Ms. Donovan learned of only upon arrival at school Monday morning. What began as an unexpected interruption of the school day grew into an elaborate series of learning experiences that extended over several days, and, to some degree, involved children and adults throughout the entire school. What happened and how did it come about? To answer this question, it is useful to "unpack" the above paragraph from the interview notes of September 17:

> *In our interview, Ms. Donovan described how she used an unexpected traffic safety assembly as an opportunity to do a writing exercise.*

Commentary: This assembly was a school-wide event presented in the gym by two uniformed young women employed by the local police department. The young women were known by some of the children as their summer jobs had involved monitoring bicycle safety. The assembly is a clear example of formal contact between the larger community and the school population. Bicycle and pedestrian safety are topics that are very relevant to elementary school children, and responsibility for the safety of school children is shared by school personnel, parents, public safety officers, and the community at large. Safety is a fundamental issue, and, in this case, a safety assembly

took priority over classroom and academic issues. The fact that the assembly was unexpected, yet easily incorporated into the morning was, in part, a function of the flexibility of the early weeks of school, when the daily and weekly schedules are not yet fully developed into relatively fixed routines. Ms. Donovan learned about the safety assembly before the children arrived and included it as the first entry on the daily schedule written on the chalkboard (Field Notes, 9/17/79):

> On the board, Ms. Donovan has written the "plans for today." The safety assembly is included and starred as a special occasion. The plans are as follows:
>
> Today is Sept. 17, 1979
>
9:20--10:05 Assembly*	11:30--12:15 Language Arts	2:15--2:45 Science (2) Soc. St. (3)
10:05--10:30 Gym	12:15--12:50 Lunch	2:45--3:00 Clean up
10:30--11:00 Reading	12:55--1:15 Centers	3:00--3:10 Diaries
11:00--11:15 Recess	1:15--1:55 Math	
11:15--11:30 USR	1:55--2:10 Recess	
>
> *The assembly included a film on bicycle and pedestrian safety and a talk on the same subject.*

Commentary: The 9/17/79 field notes describe the assembly as follows: "the young women talked about and showed several film strips about safety in walking or bicycling to school." The field worker who attended the assembly also remembered that this was the first school-wide assembly of the year, that some students were loud and disorderly and were brought back to order by the school principal, and that the safety presentation was not smooth and spellbinding.

One of the filmstrips actually burned up as it was being projected. In short, this assembly had as much to do with learning how to behave at an assembly as it did with safety rules.

It was during the assembly that Ms. Donovan had the idea of using this experience as the basis for a writing activity later in the morning. While the data do not reveal what triggered the idea, earlier interviews and observations suggest that Ms. Donovan was predisposed to make the most of the unexpected. She valued writing and believed that school writing activities must have a clear purpose if they are to be successful. On the second day of school, Ms. Donovan and her students did another writing activity that began with the "common experience" of a film. She describes this activity in her journal entry of September 9:

> I was pleased with Friday's writing lesson. Motivation was movie on word families, then students wrote and illustrated sentences utilizing a word family (e.g., Jim Rice slid on ice and landed in lice.) This type of open-ended lesson seems to be the most effective. Children with differing abilities can be as simplistic or sophisticated [as they want to] depending upon their creativity. Instruction is to the group, but the results are individualized without isolation from the total group. (Teacher Journal, 9/9/79)

As will become apparent as the Safety Posters Activity unfolds, the structure of this occasion for writing includes an initial shared experience (the safety assembly), a clear purpose and audience, and the kind of open-ended opportunity for children to produce something that reflects their ability, creativity, and sophistication. The most advanced students are not held back, and the least advanced students can still achieve a measure of success. In short, the

safety assembly probably triggered the plan for the Safety Posters Activity because the assembly fit Ms. Donovan's pattern or set of criteria for a good writing activity. It seems that this "spontaneous planning" that Ms. Donovan engaged in is more frequently seen in curriculum areas like language arts, where there are few published series or kits, than in subjects like math, reading, and science, which are largely structured by published materials.

> *After Ms. Donovan and her students returned to Room 12, she asked them to recall the safety rules that they had just heard about. Ms. Donovan said that she was very surprised at the terrific difficulty that the children had in remembering the safety rules.*

Commentary: Again, the field notes give a clearer picture of what actually happened on that Monday morning. Ms. Donovan's students stayed in the gym after the safety assembly for physical education (10:05--10:30 a.m.). When the children returned to Room 12, they worked on reading worksheets, went to recess, then did 15 minutes of silent reading. It was not until 11:35 a.m. (Language Arts time) that the children were asked to recall the safety rules taught in the assembly. Given so many interpolated activities, that the assembly itself was full of interruptions and distractions, and that the children did not know in advance that they would be expected to remember the specific wording of the safety rules, it is not surprising that they had difficulty. The safety assembly was an experience removed in time and space from the classroom. The children had no props or memory aids to stimulate their recall.

> *At first, they could remember only the general topic of the assembly. With some coaching and reminding, several of the rules were recalled.*

Commentary: In attempting to bring her plan into action, Ms. Donovan had to take on the roles of "class memory" and "memory coach." She had assumed that the safety assembly experience would be sufficiently recent and vivid to serve as the common experience basis for the language arts activity. When Ms. Donovan discovered (to her surprise) that the children did not remember the specific safety rules, she changed her plan on the spot. The teacher's task now became to re-create the common experience in a form, place, and time such that all the students had it available to them for use in the next part of the activity. The field notes (9/17/79, p. 3) show how this was done:

> As part of language arts, Ms. Donovan asks students to "re-run" this morning's safety program and recall what they learned. On a piece of large white paper up front, Ms. Donovan prints what they recall. The format is that an individual raises her/his hand. Ms. Donovan writes down what (s)he says. Another student is asked to read it back.
>
> Ms. Donovan writes down what students say in multi-color magic markers:
>
> 1. Don't run on the street without looking.
> 2. Don't take shortcuts you don't know.
> 3. Don't cross the street when the light is red.
> 4. When you ride your bike, keep your hands on the handlebars.*
>
> *This formulation arrived at after several revisions. Ms. Donovan has said, "Take your time and re-state it, how you want to say it." In coming up with this one, students chime in with alternatives; Ms. Donovan asks them to let her restate it.
>
> (This activity resembles others that have been observed so far. It is the generation of general information posters by the whole group with Ms. Donovan acting as scribe.)
>
> In coming up with sentences, Ms. Donovan says, "Sometimes does it take a couple of times to get out what you want to say? That's OK." The person who offers the original idea has the final say as to how it is written down. (Field Notes, 9/17/79, p. 3)

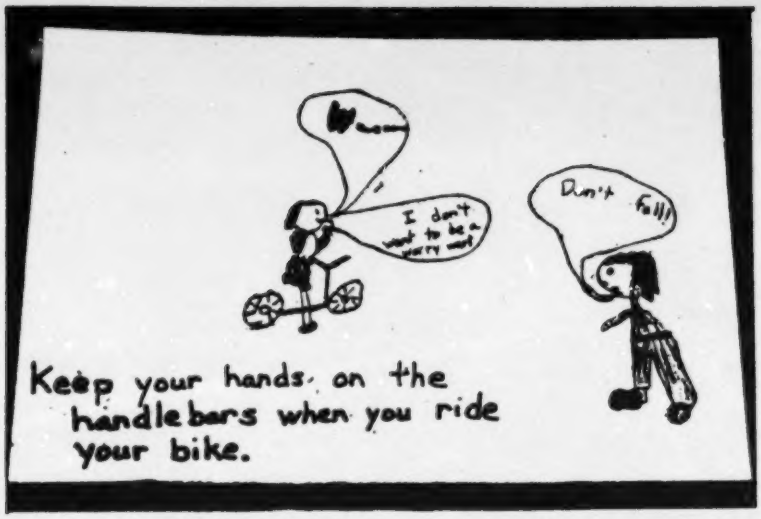
This process continues until 10 safety rules are recorded. Notice that Ms. Donovan goes to some length to see that every student has a chance to be actively involved in the rule generation part of this process. Oral editing, friendly amendments, and reading aloud are all used to produce a document that every child has had a hand in and understands. Mechanics such as spelling and penmanship are taken care of by the teacher acting as scribe. The use of a rough draft is foreshadowed by Ms. Donovan's statement that "Sometimes does it take a couple of minutes to get out what you want to say? That's OK." In short, this part of the Safety Posters Activity constitutes a collective and largely oral preparation for writing that makes visible how the solitary, silent author could prepare to write (and is an activity in which even kids who have "forgotten how to write" can compose).

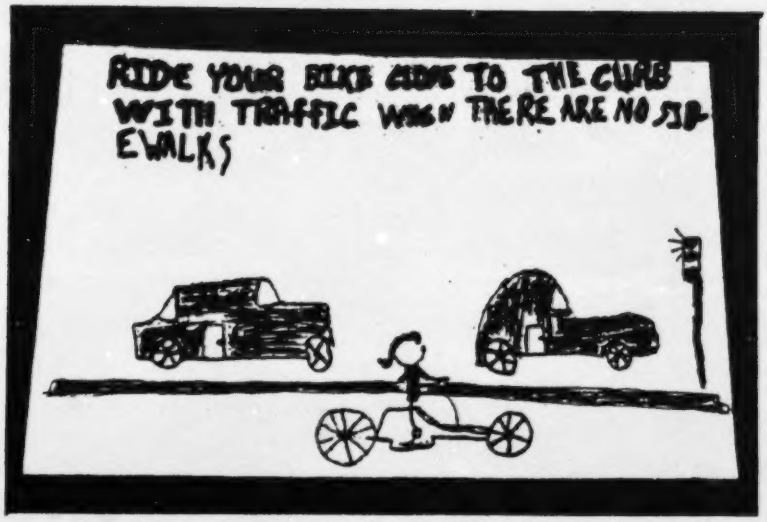
> *Then Ms. Donovan asked the students to each choose one safety rule and draw a picture illustrating the rule. These poster-size pictures, with the safety rules as captions, will be posted in the hallways as a service and a reminder to the other students in the school.*

Commentary: This was the point at which the full plan was first communicated to the children, that is, the part of the plan that had to do with transforming what the students "knew" into graphic form. The students were given a choice, within a clear and limited set of alternatives, and this element of student choice seems to have been an important part of Ms. Donovan's beliefs about effective learning activities, particularly in writing. The combination of drawing and writing is also a striking aspect of this task, as

illustrated in Figure 1. Other researchers have commented on the close and mutually supportive relationship between drawing and writing, especially in the early grades (e.g., Graves, 1978; Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan, 1977; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1978; Clay, 1975). The field notes give a vivid and more complete portrayal of the writing/drawing phase of the Safety Posters activity:

> Next Ms. Donovan asks students to think of ways to help remind the rest of the school of these rules. The students suggest the following:
>
> "take them around"
> "put them up on the hallway*
> "tell them not to do it"
>
> *This is response to Ms. Donovan's question: "How could each one of you help remind them of one rule?
>
> (It is interesting to note that, in response to the charge, the students do not generate any means that are specifically writing-related. They do, however, offer symbolic alternatives that are largely visual.)
>
> After the students make their suggestions, Ms. Donovan says, "I had an idea, too. Each (person) could make a poster with one rule and put it in the hallway."
>
> The students say, "Yeah!"
> Ms. Donovan: "Do a picture and write the rule on the bottom."
>
> Before getting started, an additional rule is generated:
>
> 11. Don't ride a bike too big for you.
>
> At 11:50, as students go to their seats to start, Ms. Donovan says, "At the end I'll write the rule for you or you can write it yourself in marker. The picture has to be done in crayon."
>
> The students sit quietly at first. Overheard is the following exchange:
>
> Student: "What are you going to do?"
> Student: "I don't know; I'm still thinking."
>
> Some students prefer to write the rule first; others make pictures first. Several students found the





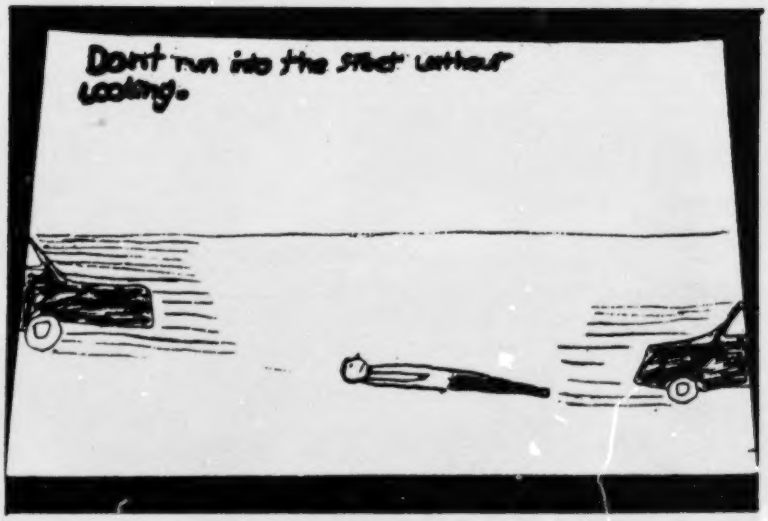


Figure 1. Sample Safety Posters

> task difficult for several reasons, e.g., they did not want to do a rule that they found out a lot of other students were doing; they couldn't draw what they needed to illustrate the rule (such as a bicycle). The upshot of these difficulties was that by the end of the available time, some students were completely finished while others were just getting started. (Field Notes, 9/17/79, pp. 4-5)

Notice that both the purpose of the posters and the audience for the posters are specified before crayon touches paper. The students were guided by their teacher to participate in "coming up with the idea" of drawing safety posters. All of the necessary elements were now in place: the list of rules on "experience paper," crayons, poster paper, an opportunity for choice and originality, a sense of shared ownership of the project, and the dual motivation of having one's work displayed in the hallway (a place of honor) and of doing good (perhaps even saving a life) by reminding other schoolmates of the safety rules. Ms. Donovan takes a further step to minimize threat by offering to write the rule herself on the bottom of the posters of those students who want or need that help.

The time allowed for drawing and safety rule writing was about 45 minutes (11:30--12:15). As the field notes indicate, there were wide individual differences in task completion. This is an issue that Ms. Donovan returns to again and again during the course of the year. For example, the issue was first raised in the September 17 interview:

> In discussing planning and diagnostic testing, Ms. Donovan raised a perennial problem for teachers: how to deal with the relatively large differences in the speed at which children work when they are working independently. "What should I do with the kids who finish fast? When I give them fun and extension activities to do I feel that the children who finish

> more slowly are being gypped. I like closure--everyone must finish. I don't want the slower kids to get farther and farther behind."
>
> (It is interesting to note that this problem of individual differences in working speed has shown up so early in the year. We should take care to note the ways in which Ms. Donovan deals with this issue as she tries to resolve an apparent conflict between her personal philosophy and value on equal opportunity and the practical realities of a mixed ability class. She seems to recognize that faster is not always better. This might be especially true in writing.) (Interview Notes, 9/17/79)

Epilogue: The Safety Posters Activity continued to develop as though it had a life of its own. By Wednesday, September 19 (two days after the safety assembly) all of the posters were finished. That day, in a conversation at lunch with the kindergarten teacher, Ms. Donovan had the idea that her students should make small group presentations of their posters to the kindergarten children as a prelude to displaying the posters in the school hallways. Arrangements were made to do this on Thursday, September 20. During the morning and afternoon that day, groups of three or four of Ms. Donovan's students were sent to the kindergarten room to show their posters and teach the younger children the safety rules. The field notes for September 20 and 21 show how this process developed:

> (9/20/79, p. 1): At 9:20, students gather in the center. Ms. Donovan says, "The kindergarteners are just learning to get along together." This comment is prelude to her sending several students to kindergarten to hang posters and tell about them. (Yesterday at lunch, Ms. Donovan negotiated the time and purpose of the safety poster sharing with Mr. Brown, the kindergarten teacher.)
>
> (9/20/79, p. 1): Dani returns from the kindergarten and says that she was scared to read her poster to the children. She says that, "the kids didn't even listen," but that she read it and showed them her drawing anyway.

> (9/20/79, p. 3): [At about 11:00] Before the students left for pictures, they began to talk about their experiences of sharing the safety posters with the kindergarten earlier this morning. Some said they found it "embarrassing" and "scary." Some students said they thought it might have helped to practice beforehand. They agree that students who will go this afternoon should practice first. Ms. Donovan tells the other students to help them practice by asking questions "that you think the first graders would ask." As a few students stand up to do it, their peers applaud their efforts.
>
> (9/20/79, p. 4): At 12:55 the students reconvene in the center. Ms. Donovan, who has had a chance to talk to Mr. Brown (the kindergarten teacher) at lunch, says, "Mr. Brown said that you guys did a good job this morning, even if you were nervous." Then five students leave with their posters to talk to Mr. Brown's afternoon class, saying they are nervous. (Lea has a stomach ache.)
>
> (9/21/79, p. 3): At 12:55, after lunch, the students gather in the center. Afternoon roll is taken and one of the students reads the "afternoon plans." Three students leave for the kindergarten with their safety posters. Ms. Donovan asks them, "Do you know what yours says?" She has them read back what's written on the posters before leaving.
>
> (9/21/79, p. 3): At 1:05, students return from kindergarten.
>
> Ms. Donovan: "How'd it go?"
> Student: "Terrific."
> Student: "Not very many questions, though."

Oral presentation of the safety posters to the kindergarten children added a number of things to the Safety Posters Activity. The second- and third-grade authors' sense of audience was undoubtedly heightened. They saw very clearly that it was useful to re-examine, edit, and rehearse what they had written if an audience is expected to understand their messages. They learned that writing and drawing can be used to focus oral communication (in this case, teaching), and that a graphic product can serve the author as a reminder and illustration of his or her teaching. Ms. Donovan's

students also learned from one another's experience and served as a constructively critical audience for the dress rehearsals. And finally, this phase of the project served as a meaningful connection between two groups of children within the school, showing on a small scale how writing can contribute to the building of a social system when members are separated in space and time.

This has been a lengthy description and analysis of the Safety Posters Activity, one of literally dozens of occasions for writing that took place in the two classrooms under study during a full school year. The analysis of and commentary on the Safety Posters Activity have raised a number of issues about how, why, and under what circumstances written literacy is acquired in schools, and what roles the teacher and students play in this process. Like many other occasions for writing noted in the earliest weeks of school, the Safety Posters Activity began with a shared experience not originally planned by Ms. Donovan. Also, like many other early writing occasions, this one had importance in both the school and non-school lives of the students. It was an expressive enterprise that moved the students beyond the boundaries of Room 12. Ms. Donovan seized the opportunity to turn an unexpected event into an occasion for writing. Her engagement of students in a series of related expressive activities, both written and oral, involved her in a special sort of pedagogical role. Ms. Donovan extended her planning and teaching beyond the bounds of prepared instructional materials and district mandates for the language arts. She created writing curriculum with her students as the class jointly produced a situation

that would both support the practice of writing and be supported by that writing. Ms. Donovan and her students participated in an extended communicative enterprise that involved the practice of written literacy as they prepared and shared documents they called "The Safety Posters."

Summary of Findings

In the Written Literacy Project we have learned a great deal that is of potential interest to parents, teachers, teacher educators, policy makers, and educational researchers. A detailed and carefully conducted inside look at the classroom as a place in which writing is used and taught can inform us all as we attempt to nurture the process of acquisition of literacy among our young people. Below we have highlighted some of the things we have learned about writing--its forms and functions in school and its instruction.

1. Although it is commonly lamented that children do not write in school and that teachers do not teach writing, we have observed that writing is ubiquitous there. If one does not limit one's view to formal instruction in writing, one finds that writing is, indeed, a commonly-taken expressive option in the academic and social life of the classroom.

2. Writing has many forms and functions in the classroom. Related to these, children and teacher(s) play different roles depending on the social contexts in which writing is undertaken. Sometimes children are individual authors, sometimes they collaborate. Some audiences are present or near at hand. Others are absent. Sometimes the teacher is a helper, sometimes a critic, and sometimes an audience for student writing.

3. Key among the functions that writing served in the classrooms we studied are the following:
   a. writing to know oneself and others,
   b. writing to occupy free time,
   c. writing to participate in community, and
   d. writing to demonstrate academic achievement.

Each of these functions of writing is an instance of writing in use within the classroom and/or wider social milieu. Familiarity with the variety of forms of writing available and the functions they can perform is a major part of what it means to have acquired written literacy. In the classroom there is much incidental acquisition of literacy as children and their teacher(s) engage in everyday social and academic life.

4. Writing is also taught explicitly and directly by the teachers we have studied. However, it is not taught and/or planned for in terms either of discrete compositional or grammatical skills or in terms of individual lessons or activities. Rather more typical is the long-range planning for writing that results in the development of occasions for writing. Occasions for writing appear to be meaningful instructional units for teachers. They are typified by the following features:

   a. occasions for writing have a duration long enough to link multiple activities,

   b. activities constituting an occasion for writing arise in the context of or are planned with reference to classroom and community life,

   c. activities are linked thematically over time within an occasion, and

   d. activities constituting an occasion are expressive in nature and may involve multiple modes on the continuum of oral-written expression (e.g., writing, drawing, speaking before an audience, reading, etc.).

5. Occasions for writing frequently involve skill integration both among the language arts of speaking, listening, reading and writing, and across subject areas. In addition they often integrate school and non-school life experiences of the student writers.

6. Occasions for writing require a range of kinds of teacher planning, including the ad-hoc seizing of opportunities to write in the course of everyday school life; proactive planning to develop ways to support and maintain expressive activities; post-hoc reflection upon classroom life and writing to identify potential occasions for writing and ways to enrich them as opportunities to use multiple expressive forms and perform many communicative functions; and creation of curriculum for and with students in an

instructional area marked by the absence of prepared materials, district mandates, or ready-made evaluation instruments.

Implications

Writing does, indeed, occur in the classroom, and much of it is enabled by teacher thought and action. But, lacking the props and constraints of other basic skill areas, writing is often "invisible" in that it is taken for granted as teachers report their instructional lives or as researchers seek evidence of writing instruction--or even as children or parents talk about the writing done in school. Writing in everyday school life may be invisible in the sense that talk is invisible in everyday life--it is such a part of day-to-day transaction (tests, worksheets, essays, notes, letters, etc.) that it is taken for granted. It may be useful to place this taken-for-granted expressive mode and the opportunities for its practice and use in the foreground of attention as parents and practitioners plan for and reflect upon the opportunities for writing currently available in their schools, classrooms, families and communities.

The final report of the Written Literacy Project (Clark & Florio, Note 1) discusses implications of this work for the practice of teaching and for future research. Practical implications discussed deal with the issues of audience, use of models in writing instruction, insuring a sense of purpose for young writers, establishing expectations for school writing, and evaluation and constructive criticism of student writing. Additional research is urged on these specific topics as well as more broadly descriptive inquiry in settings different from those studied here, together with new research initiatives on the problem of putting written literacy research into practice.

Products

This executive summary, along with the final report, constitute the final deliverables to the National Institute of Education under this grant. In addition, the journal articles, book chapters, and other papers listed below have been produced during the course of this project as reports focusing on particular substantive and methodological issues surrounding the teaching of and study of writing. Beyond these formal papers and publications we have conducted a number of colloquia at other universities, in-service teachers' workshops in local school districts, and consultant visits with the State of Michigan Department of Education and with researchers and practitioners interested in research on teaching.

Written Literacy Study Reports and Publications

Clark, C.M., & Florio, S. Diary time: The life history of an occasion for writing. In J. Schwartz & B. Bushing (Eds.), Integrating the language arts. Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, in press. (Also available as IRT Research Series No. 106. East Lansing, Michigan: Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University, 1981.) (This paper was presented at the Pre-Conference Session at the 32nd Annual Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics titled, Writing in the classroom: Qualitative studies, Washington, DC, March, 1981.)

Clark, C.M., & Florio, S. Understanding writing in school: Issues of theory and method. In P. Mosenthal & S. Walmsley (Eds.), Methodological approaches to writing research. New York: Longman Press, in press. (This paper was presented at the State University of New York at Albany Conference in Writing Research, Albany, New York, May, 1980.)

Clark, C.M., & Florio, S. with Elmore, J.L., Martin, J., Maxwell, R.J., & Metheny, W. Understanding writing in school: A descriptive study of writing and its instruction in two classrooms. Final Report of the Written Literacy Study (Grant No. 90840) funded by the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education. Available as IRT Research Series No. 104. East Lansing, Michigan: Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University, 1982.

Florio, S., & Clark, C.M. Occasions for writing in the classroom: Toward a description of the functions of written literacy in school. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, December, 1979.

Florio, S., & Clark, C.M. The functions of writing in an elementary classroom. To appear in the May, 1982 issue of the journal, Research in the Teaching of English, forthcoming. (A version of this paper was presented at the National Conference on Language Arts in the Elementary School, Portland, Oregon, April, 1981.)

Florio, S., & Clark, C.M. What is writing for? Writing in the first weeks of school in a second/third grade classroom. In L. Cherry-Wilkinson (Ed.), Communicating in the classroom. New York: Academic Press, in press.

Maxwell, R.J. The teaching of writing: A descriptive study. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English/Language Arts, Portland, Oregon, April, 1981.

Reference Notes

1. Clark, C.M. & Florio, S. Understanding writing in school: A descriptive study of writing and its instruction in two classrooms (Research Series No. 104). East Lansing, Michigan: Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University, 1982.

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Ervin-Tripp, S., & Mitchell-Kernan, D. Child discourse. New York: Academic Press, 1977.

Graves, D.H. Balance the basics. Let them write. New York: The Ford Foundation, 1978.